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ABSTRACT

This study examined the use of problem-based learning (PBL) in an actual counseling session and the effects on student assertiveness skills. A group of seventh-grade students, who were all victims of bullies, participated in the study. The students, two boys and one girls, were 13 and 14 years old. Teachers rated the level of assertiveness skills that students exhibited when confronted by other students. After the establishment of baseline skills, group counseling sessions were conducted twice a week for 3 weeks according to an adapted PBL model. Students identified a common problem they wanted to resolve. They then made a list of facts and asked open-ended questions concerning the problem. They held a discussion about each question, formed hypotheses, identified counseling issues, and listed resources. Student assertiveness skills were measured after the intervention, and findings indicate that treatment using the PBL methodology was effective in increasing assertiveness skills. An appendix contains the assertiveness rating scale. (SLD)

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Implementing Problem-Based Learning in the Counseling Session

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Implementing Problem-Based Learning in the Counseling Session

As a method for strengthening science and mathematics, problem-based learning (PBL) has been utilized throughout the world. PBL is a teaching philosophy that encourages students to work collaboratively to uncover solutions to problems (Neufeld & Barrows, 1974; Schmidt, 1993; Boud & Feletti, 1997; Barrows, 2000). It is based upon the premise that students will work in small groups, individually research specific issues relevant to the identified problem, reconvene after a period of independent research, and then collaboratively discuss their research findings. Fundamental to PBL are the formulation of open-ended questions that lead to systematic, self-directed inquiry and the revision of hypotheses through the attainment of newly acquired knowledge. PBL requires students to actively discuss and analyze problems, form hypotheses, and create personal learning issues. This process enables students to not only acquire and apply content knowledge to the future workplace, but also to learn and practice communication skills that are critical to lifelong success (Mennin, Gordan, Majoor, & Osman, 2003; Wood, 2003). The process of PBL actively involves students by presenting them with a problem before any advance readings, lectures, or preparation. Students then identify facts from the problem, ask open-ended questions concerning each fact, formulate hypotheses for each question, determine the key learning issues, and then locate multiple resources to solve the written problem. Throughout this process, the teacher serves as a facilitator by questioning, encouraging, and acting as a resource. Students then research possible solutions to the problem, bring findings back to class, and determine the best solution through class discussion. Students are constantly engaged in the learning process. They are solving real world problems that they will face in their profession and learning how to utilize resources.

Research indicates that students in PBL report more satisfaction, less stress, and more encouragement in their learning environment when compared to students from traditional programs. PBL students also indicated that they studied more for understanding and meaning, used a broad variety of learning resources, and utilized the library for independent research. Finally, research has indicated that long-term recall is enhanced for students in a PBL curriculum and that PBL medical students appear to have superior clinical skills and perform better in the clinical setting (Vernon & Blake, 1993; Albanese & Mitchell, 1993).

The utilization of PBL in a variety of disciplines to improve learning outcomes seems limitless. While PBL has been shown to produce positive results in medical education, it has not been adopted as a methodology for helping students solve personal problems. This study examined the utilization of PBL in the actual counseling session and the effects on student assertiveness skills.

Method

Participants

A group of three seventh-grade students, who were all victims of bullies, participated in the study. All students were African American and enrolled in a large junior high school in Mississippi. The students, two boys and one girl, ranged in age from 13 to 14 years old.

Measurement

Teachers rated the level of assertiveness skills that students exhibited when confronted by other students. Since teachers at this junior high school meet in teams, each team evaluated the students' assertiveness skills and then completed the assertiveness

rating scale (see Appendix A). The rating scale was completed twice a week and given to the school counselor.

Experimental Procedures

An AB single-subject design replicated across three participants was utilized to determine the effectiveness of problem-based learning (PBL) on assertiveness skills of the victims of bullies. For the purpose of this study, assertiveness skills included confronting the bully, walking away from the bully, or telling the bully to stop.

Baseline. Teachers recorded assertiveness skills for three weeks prior to intervention. A minimum of five stable data points was required to participate in the group counseling sessions.

Intervention. Following the completion of baseline, group counseling sessions were conducted twice a week for three weeks. The sessions were structured according to an adapted PBL model: identify problem/concern, discern facts from rumors/opinions, ask appropriate open-ended questions, identify main counseling concern, and locate resources. Students began by identifying a common problem that they all wanted to resolve, which was bullies. Then they made a list of facts and asked open-ended questions surrounding the problem. The group then held a discussion about each question, formed hypotheses, identified counseling issues, and finally listed resources (See Appendix B).

Results

Trends in the data were observed using the graphical representation method normally used for the analysis of single subject design studies (Ottenbacher, 1986). Observations made during phase A were compared with those made during phase B. Results indicated that all three students improved in assertiveness skills (see Appendix

C). The minimum score on the assertiveness rating scale was 3 and the maximum score was a 9. Student 1, 2, and 3 averaged 3.2, 3.0, and 3.0, respectively, on the assertiveness rating scale prior to intervention; however, scores increased to 8, 7, and 6, respectively, at the end of the intervention. This indicates that treatment utilizing the PBL methodology was effective for increasing assertiveness skills among these seventh-grade students.

Discussion

This study provides an indication of the effectiveness of PBL in developing assertiveness skills. The degree of changes observed in phase B was sufficient to suggest that these changes may have reflected the influence of the intervention. There were no apparent reasons for the changes in the behavior other than the introduction of the intervention.

The PBL model was effective for this group of students for increasing assertiveness skills. The model fits well within the academic climate and students indicated that the problem-solving process was easy to follow. With the limited amount of time that school counselors have to devote to each student, the PBL methodology could be useful in teaching students not only social skills but also personal problem-solving skills. Since the focus of PBL is on finding the best solutions for problems of real life, application to counseling seems appropriate.

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Appendix A

Assertiveness Skills Rating Scale for Teachers

Student Name: _____

Date: _____

Please observe the student throughout the day. Meet with teacher team and discuss student's behavior during day. Circle the appropriate number that represents the student's response to the bully or bullies. The code for numbers is as follows:

1—behavior not observed

2—behavior attempted but not effective

3—behavior observed and effective

1. Student looked directly at bully and told him/her to stop the behavior.	1	2	3
2. Student walked away from the bully.	1	2	3
3. Student told teacher.	1	2	3

Total score: _____

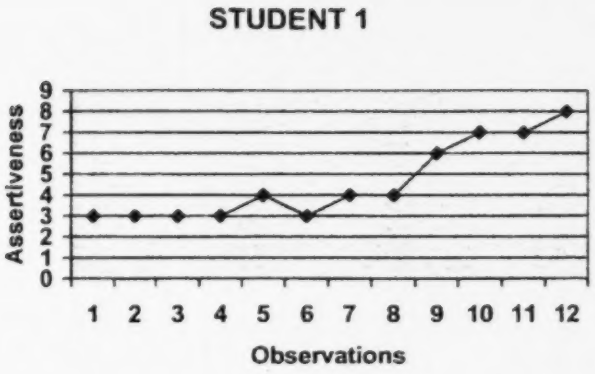
Appendix B

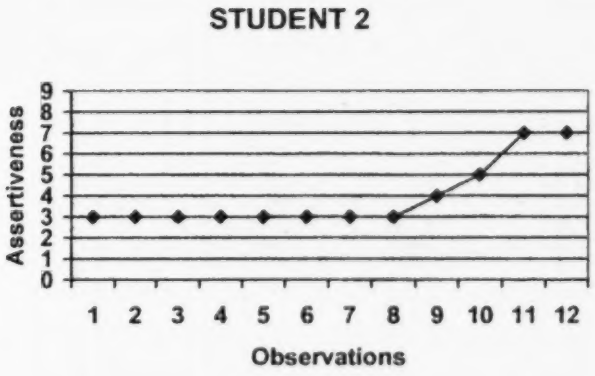
PBL Panels

CONCERN	QUESTIONS	HYPOTHESES
Foes and Bullies	1a. Why do people push us? b. Who pushes us? c. What can we do when they push us? 2a. Why do people call us names? b. When do people call us names? c. What can we do when people call us names? 3a. How can stop rumors? 4a. Why do people try to fight us? b. When do people try to fight us?	1a. don't like us, said something to them b. (names of students) c. push back, tell 2a. don't like us, impress others b. all the time, in the hallway c. ignore them, call them names 3a. tell teacher 4a. did something to them, don't like us, to impress others b. bathroom, hallway
DATA—FACTS		
1. People push us. 2. People call us names. 3. People spread rumors about us. 4. People try to fight us.		

COUNSELING ISSUES	RESOURCES	WHAT I WILL DO
Why do people try to fight us? What can we do when people try to fight us? What can we do when people call us names?	Counseling books Internet School counselor Parents Friends Teachers	Stand up to bully Tell the bully to leave me alone Tell my friends Walk away

Appendix C


STUDENT 1
Assertiveness
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12
Observations


STUDENT 2
Assertiveness
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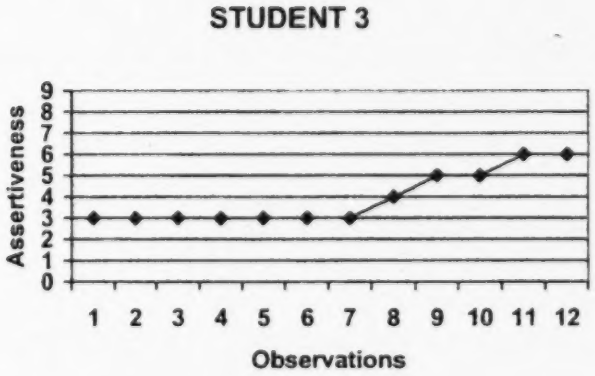
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12
Observations


STUDENT 3
Assertiveness
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12
Observations

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